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Mather LifeWays researchers, educators, and other professionals who are leaders in creating Ways to Age Well.SM

Top 10 Power Foods for Older Adults

Brought to you by Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging

Top 10 Power Foods for Older Adults

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The old saying, “you are what you eat” is true. Today’s health care professionals all agree: it’s possible to reduce your risk of developing heart disease, diabetes, and even certain types of cancer by simply looking at your current diet. Depending on your condition, your diet may require modification, or, if you’re in a diet rut, you can change up your own menu cheaply and easily.

The first and most important step before undertaking a diet change is to talk with your doctor, who will discuss your general health related to diet and will recommend resources—including a consultation with a registered dietician. And, just like what your mother told you years ago, the first advice you are likely to hear is that moderation is the key to good health. And while most dietary plans tell you what you can’t eat (usually your favorite foods), the best nutrition strategy involves focusing on what you *can* and *should* eat. In fact, research has shown that adding certain foods to your diet is just as important as cutting back on others.

TOP 10 POWER FOODS

1. **Whole Grains** – For general protection

- Three daily servings of whole grains can help reduce the risk of *heart disease* (by 25 to 36 percent); *stroke* (by 37 percent); and *diabetes* (by 21 to 27 percent)
- Whole grains fill you up fast so you are less likely to overeat
- *Tip:* Look for “whole grain” on labels; whole grains include oats, whole wheat, brown rice, bulgur, and bran

2. **Yogurt** – For boosting immunity

- Source of probiotics, the “friendly” bacteria that fight illness and disease
- Research has found that eating yogurt helps the body fight off pneumonia
- *Tip:* Look for yogurt containing “live” or “active” cultures

3. **Salmon** – For bones

- Source of omega-3 fatty acids, which are thought to help preserve bone density
- May reduce blood pressure, lower cholesterol, and help prevent heart disease
- May also help fight prostate cancer, depression/mood disorders, and reduce arthritis pain
- Alternative sources: cold-water fish, including sardines, tuna, and mackerel
- *Tip/Caution:* Watch for mercury levels in some fish; check where all fish comes from, the type of fish, and eat in moderation: about one, 3-ounce fillet or can of fish per week

Research has found that eating yogurt helps the body fight off pneumonia

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Tomatoes can help men already diagnosed with prostate cancer; recent research showed that men who consumed tomato sauce daily for three weeks found their Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA) levels decreased by 20 percent

4. **Walnuts** – For heart health

- Source of omega-3 fatty acids, which may reduce the risk of heart disease and high blood pressure
- Research has found that eating 1/4 to 1/3 cup of walnuts per day can lower “bad” cholesterol by up to 10 percent
- Alternative sources: almonds and pistachios—high in arginine, an amino acid that helps increase blood flow to the heart
- *Tip/Caution:* Eat nuts in moderation, as they are high in fat and calories

5. **Blueberries** – For cognitive health

- Have the highest levels of disease-fighting antioxidants (out of 40 different fruits and vegetables)
- One, half-cup is only 40 calories, has almost no fat, plenty of vitamin C, and two grams of fiber
- May also decrease brain damage from stroke and effects of Alzheimer’s or dementia
- Protect cells from damage and may restore cells to healthy levels

6. **Beans** – To help fight colon cancer

- Source of protein and antioxidants; provide plenty of fiber, which may prevent colon cancer
- Can decrease blood pressure and “bad” cholesterol, lowering risk of heart disease
- *Tip:* All beans are good for you; two to four servings a week is recommended

7. **Tomatoes** – For prostate health

- Regular consumption can decrease risk of prostate cancer by up to 35 percent
- Can help men already diagnosed with prostate cancer; recent research showed that men who consumed tomato sauce daily for three weeks found their Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA) levels decreased by 20 percent
- Contain lycopene, another antioxidant thought to protect against lung and stomach cancers
- *Tip:* Cooked tomatoes may have more potency than fresh ones

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Smokers may be less likely to develop emphysema and bronchitis on an apple-a-day diet

8. Apples – For lung health

- Can be more effective in fighting lung disease than other fruits and vegetables
- Smokers may be less likely to develop emphysema and bronchitis on an apple-a-day diet
- Have only about 80 calories, little fat, and plenty of fiber (a special type called pectin, which helps to lower cholesterol and control blood sugar)
- Have the mineral *boron*, which is thought to boost alertness and reduce the risk of osteoporosis
- *Tip:* “An apple a day” really *can* keep the doctor away!

9. Ginger – For dealing with nausea

- Considered helpful in fighting morning sickness and queasy stomachs
- May also help lower blood pressure and increase circulation

10. Red Grapes – For a heart health

- Contain polyphenols, which are thought to help fight heart disease
- *Note:* If you’ve heard the term, “The French Paradox,” then you understand how red grapes are important to lowering the risk of heart disease; the Paradox explains how the French, (who tend to eat foods high in fat) have a lower risk of heart disease

*Mather LifeWays is a unique nonprofit organization that enhances the lives of older adults by creating Ways to Age Well.SM Learn more about our award-winning research at Mather LifeWays **Institute on Aging**, our **senior living residences**, and our **community initiatives**.*

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